

The Eligible Mr. Bangs

Comedy in One Act

By
ROBERT HOUSUM



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SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.

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CHARACTERS

TOM FOSTER

JANE FOSTER, *his wife*

LUCILE MORGAN, *her friend*

LEIGHTON BANGS, *an eligible young man*

SCENE: *A middle western city.*

TIME: *Present.*

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THE ELIGIBLE MR. BANGS

The scene represents the living room of an apartment about seven o'clock on a winter evening. The room is brilliantly lighted. In the left wall a doorway, hung with portières that are just now drawn, leads to the dining room. In the rear wall a large arched doorway, a little to the left of center, shows glimpses of a hallway, which, on the left, leads to the other rooms of the suite; and in the right wall of which is the entrance-door of the apartment. This hallway is also well lighted, and contains a hat-rack. There is a telephone in the rear wall of the living room, just to the right of the arched doorway. A couch, several chairs, a large table, and a small smoking-stand with matches, etc., are conveniently disposed about the room. There is a mirror on the wall.

As the curtain rises, JANE FOSTER, a young matron of 25 in evening dress, sits before the table and writes slowly and awkwardly upon a small, portable typewriter. She seems highly entertained with what she is doing. After a moment she pulls the sheet from the machine, reads over hastily what she has written, giggles and slips it into a yellow envelope that is lying on the table, which she seals with some library paste. At this moment, the telephone rings. She jumps up hastily, conceals the envelope in her corsage, and goes to the telephone.

JANE. Hello! Oh, it's you, Lucile! Come right up.

(She hangs up the receiver, runs hastily to the table, closes the typewriter up in its case and places it out of sight in a corner of the room. Then she goes into the hallway and opens the outside door. LUCILE MORGAN, a charming girl of 22 in a traveling coat and furs, enters, carrying a

suitcase. She drops it on the floor and throws her arms about JANE's neck.)

LUCILE. Jane! Darling!

JANE. Lucile! My dear! (*They come down into the living room.*) I'm so ashamed I didn't get to the train to meet you. But I have a new maid—as usual—and with a dinner-party on my hands—

LUCILE. It wasn't necessary. I jumped right into a taxi—

JANE. I tried to reach Tom—but he was on his way home—

LUCILE. I didn't mind a bit.

JANE. And by the time he got here, it was too late.

LUCILE. Where is the old dear? I'm crazy to see him.

JANE. Dressing. He'll be out in a minute. Lucile, I'm so glad you could come.

LUCILE. So am I. And now that I'm here, do, for goodness' sake, satisfy my curiosity.

JANE. What about?

LUCILE. You said you were asking me for a very special reason.

JANE. And so I am. (*After a slight pause.*) Lucile, I've found the very man for you!

LUCILE (*laughing*). Oh, my dear, are you as determined as ever to get me married?

JANE. More so.

LUCILE. But why?

JANE. Because I want you to be as happy as I am. Of course the man I've picked for you isn't as nice as Tom—no one is—but he's the next best thing.

LUCILE. Well, dear, you can hardly blame me if I'm just a little skeptical.

JANE. Skeptical? Why?

LUCILE. You know, when I came to visit you *last* year, you thought you'd found the very man for me—that Mr.—what was his name?

JANE. Bangs. Leighton Bangs.

LUCILE. Yes, that was it—Mr. Bangs. And, my dear, he hated me.

JANE. Lucile! He did not!

LUCILE (*laughing*). Then he gave a splendid imitation of it. He never said "boo" to me all the time I was here.

JANE. Well, Leighton's peculiar. He's the most eligible man I know—a perfect peach in every way—but he's got it into his head that all the nice girls are married. It's an odd idea.

LUCILE. Odd? I think it's insane!

JANE. And so, while he's a perfect lamb to all his pals' wives, he won't have a word to say to unmarried girls. He's made up his mind he doesn't like them.

LUCILE. I knew he hated me.

JANE. He never got to know you. If he had, he would have adored you. (*She lights a cigarette.*) Have a cigarette?

LUCILE. You know I don't smoke.

JANE. Oh, my dear, you should. Those are two things I'm determined you shall do—learn to smoke and get married.

LUCILE. Well, Jane, it's very kind of you to go husband-hunting for me, but really, I wish you'd stop it.

JANE. Why?

LUCILE. Because it isn't any use. I'm not—in the market.

JANE (*pouncing upon her with a shout*). Lucile Morgan, are you engaged?

LUCILE. No!

JANE. You are! And you never wrote me about it. You mean thing!

LUCILE. But I'm *not* engaged—truly I'm not.

JANE. Honestly? (*LUCILE shakes her head in denial.*) Then you're in love!

LUCILE. Why, Jane dear, whatever makes you think—

JANE. Lucile, you may talk yourself blue in the face, but you can't deceive me. You *are* in love. Now sit right down and tell me all about it.

LUCILE. There's nothing to tell. I—met a man—and—and—I liked him. I liked him a lot, but he—he didn't like me—at all.

JANE. Didn't *like* you? Are you sure?

LUCILE. Positive.

JANE (*angrily*). I've never heard of such a thing. He must have been blind. Such a man isn't worth thinking about, Lucile—you must forget him.

LUCILE (*shaking her head*). That isn't so easy. I *have* tried, but—I can't.

JANE. Yes, you can. And you're going to. I'll help you—and so will the man I've picked out—

LUCILE. No, dear, it's no use. I couldn't ever care for him. I don't take the slightest interest in him. (*After a pause.*) What's his name?

JANE. It's—it's—Leighton Bangs.

LUCILE. What? The same one you picked out for me last time?

JANE. I know, dear, but—

LUCILE. The one who hated me?

JANE. But this time he *won't* hate you. It will be entirely different.

LUCILE. What makes you think so? (*With sudden eagerness.*) Jane! Did he tell you that he—liked me after all?

JANE. Well, no. He hasn't said anything about you. But wait until you've seen him.

LUCILE. But I don't want to see him.

JANE. You'll have to. He's coming to dinner.

LUCILE. Here? To-night?

JANE. Yes. Any minute now.

LUCILE (*on the verge of tears*). Jane—I can't—I simply can not see him. Tell him I'm ill—that I've got a headache— (*She picks up her wrap and hat and starts for the hall.*) I'll stay in my room until he's gone and—

JANE. Lucile Morgan, *he* is the man you're in love with!

LUCILE. Oh, no—no—

JANE. Of course he is! Or why don't you want to see him? You can't deny it—you know you can't. *Can you?* (*LUCILE does not answer.*) I thought not!

LUCILE. I—I couldn't help it, Jane. He's so wonderful!

JANE. Isn't he? Lucile, I'm just tickled to death over this. I said from the first you were made for each other.

LUCILE. But I tell you, he hates me.

JANE. And I tell *you* that as soon as he knows you, he'll adore you.

LUCILE. But how is he ever going to get to know me if he won't speak to unmarried girls?

JANE. He'll speak to *you*.

LUCILE. How do you know?

JANE. Lucile, I asked him here to-night to meet my friend, Mrs. Ellsworth.

LUCILE. Who's Mrs. Ellsworth?

JANE. *You* are.

LUCILE. I?

JANE. You.

LUCILE. But, Jane—

JANE. As an unmarried girl, Leighton would never learn to appreciate you. But as a married woman—

LUCILE. Oh, Jane, I don't see how I can do it—I really don't.

JANE. You've got to. Unless you are prepared to tell Tom that his wife is a liar.

LUCILE (*horrified*). You didn't tell *Tom* that I'm Mrs.—what is my name?

JANE. Mrs. Ellsworth. Of course I did. If Tom knew the truth he'd be certain to let it out. He's absolutely transparent—thank heaven! (*After a brief pause.*) Well, are you going to humiliate me before my own husband?

LUCILE. You haven't left me much choice, have you?

JANE. None whatever. You can blame the whole thing on me, if it makes you any happier.

LUCILE (*shyly*). You really think, Jane, that Leighton—that Mr. Bangs—will—like me?

JANE. My dear, he's sure to. The creature has excellent taste. He *must* have, because he likes *me*. And I'm willing to bet that before you go home, he'll be at your feet.

LUCILE. Oh, Jane, if he only would!

JANE. He will! (LUCILE *shakes her head*.) Will you bet on it? (LUCILE *nods*.) Good! If I'm wrong, I'll buy you a hat. But if I'm right—you've got to smoke a cigarette. LUCILE (*laughing*). All right. I'll risk it. But Jane—supposing you *are* right—if he thinks I'm married already, why—you see?

JANE. Just leave that to me. I'm your campaign manager and I'll pull the wires. All the candidate has to do is to make a favorable impression on the voter, and, when the time comes—accept the election.

LUCILE. Jane, you're horrid. You act as if I were trying to catch Mr. Bangs.

JANE. Well, my dear, no girl ever got a husband by sitting still and folding her hands. I'm a married woman, and, believe me, I know.

LUCILE. Just the same I hate to deceive him.

JANE (*shrugging her shoulders*). Well, you know how he acted when you were here before. (TOM *enters from left—an agreeable young man of thirty, wearing a dinner jacket*.)

TOM. Well, Lucile, how are you?

LUCILE. Tom! It's so nice to see you again! (*She shakes hands warmly with him*.)

TOM. Mighty glad you could come. How's Ed?

LUCILE (*blankly*). Who?

TOM. Ed.

JANE. Your husband, stupid!

LUCILE. Oh, Ed. He's fine, thanks. Wanted to be remembered to you.

TOM. Wish he could have come too. I'd like to meet him. But perhaps he'll run up some week-end while you're here.

LUCILE. No—no, I don't think he'll be able to.

JANE (*grinning*). We'd just love to have him, dear.

LUCILE. You see, he isn't at all well.

TOM. I thought you said he was fine?

LUCILE. Oh, he *is*—comparatively speaking. That is, he's better than he was. But not as well as he might be.

JANE (*hastily*). Tom, Leighton will be here any minute now, so you'd better shake up some cocktails.

TOM. My one household accomplishment.

JANE. While I make the salad-dressing. Lucile, I suppose you'll want to change?

LUCILE. Heavens, yes.

VOICE (*off left*). Oh, Mrs. Foster!

JANE. Yes, Ellen, I'll be right there. (*She goes to door left, then says to LUCILE.*) You'll find your trunk in your room, dear. (*She goes out left.*)

TOM. You know, Lucile, I was terribly surprised to hear you were married. Jane swears she told me at the time, but I don't remember it.

LUCILE. Well, you see, it was very sudden. (*The telephone bell rings.*)

TOM (*going to the telephone*). Hello! Oh, that you, Leighton? Come on up. (*To LUCILE.*) You remember Leighton Bangs, don't you?

LUCILE. Yes. (*She pauses a moment.*) Tom, go on and make the cocktails. I'll let Mr. Bangs in.

TOM (*looking at her curiously*). All right, Lucile. Sure.

(*He goes out left. LUCILE looks into the mirror and pats her hair into shape. Then she goes into the hall and opens the door. Then, leaving it open, she comes back into the living room and walks over right. A brisk whistling is heard and LEIGHTON enters the hall—a young man of 28, obviously in excellent spirits. He wears a light overcoat over his dinner coat.*)

LEIGHTON (*joyfully*). Hello, people! I'm a little early, but— (*He comes into the living room hilariously.*)

LUCILE. Good evening, Mr. Bangs.

LEIGHTON. Oh! (*As he catches sight of LUCILE, his entire manner changes. The good-humored, careless expression disappears from his face, and he assumes a stiff and formal manner.*) Good evening. (*He makes a stiff little bow.*)

LUCILE (*coming forward*). Perhaps you don't recall meeting me last winter when I was visiting Jane.

LEIGHTON. Oh, yes, I remember you. (*Then as if it had just occurred to him.*) How do you do?

LUCILE. Splendidly, thanks. Won't you take off your things?

LEIGHTON. Er—yes. I suppose I'd better. (*He goes out into the hall, takes off his coat and places it and his hat on the hat-rack. LUCILE comes left to meet him as he returns to the living room.*) Where's Jane?

LUCILE. Concocting a salad-dressing, I believe. Do sit down. (*LEIGHTON sits down. It is evident that he is not happy.*) Won't you have a cigarette? (*She picks up a box from the table, brings it over to him, sits beside him and offers it to him.*)

LEIGHTON. No. Can't bear Tom's. I'll smoke one of my own. (*He rises, takes out his own case, extracts a cigarette and walks over to the smoking-stand for a match.*)

LUCILE (*rising and following him*). Shan't I light it for you?

LEIGHTON (*coldly, hastily striking a match and lighting his cigarette*). Please don't bother. I still retain the use of my limbs.

(*He walks to the other side of the room. LUCILE sits down to the right. He then seats himself to the left. There is a long, deadly pause. LUCILE is obviously nervous—but LEIGHTON seems perfectly imperturbable.*)

LUCILE (*at last*). What jolly times we had last year, Mr. Bangs.

LEIGHTON (*funereally*). Yes. Very jolly.

LUCILE. Do you remember the dance at the Colonial Club?

LEIGHTON. I'll never forget it.

LUCILE (*softly*). Nor I. I think that was where you and I met for the first time.

LEIGHTON. I sat in a draught and had a crick in my neck for a week.

LUCILE (*with a commiserating air*). Oh! What a shame! Was it very painful?

LEIGHTON (*staring at her*). Did you ever have a crick in your neck?

LUCILE. I—I think so.

LEIGHTON. Then why ask? (*There is another embarrassing pause.*)

LUCILE. Well, Mr. Bangs, I think it's *your* turn now.

LEIGHTON. My turn?

LUCILE. To introduce a subject of conversation.

LEIGHTON. Oh! Perhaps it is. (*He pauses a moment, apparently in deep thought.*) Well, I pass.

LUCILE. Then I suppose I shall have to do it.

LEIGHTON (*pathetically*). Must we converse?

LUCILE. Well, it's usual, isn't it?

LEIGHTON. Yes—much too usual. However, go ahead if you want to.

LUCILE. Mr. Bangs, why do you detest unmarried girls?

LEIGHTON (*startled into attention*). Who told you that I did?

LUCILE. Jane. And I want to know why?

LEIGHTON. All right. Because they bore me.

LUCILE (*indignantly*). They are every bit as entertaining as married women.

LEIGHTON. No, they're not. And I'll tell you why. Before a girl is married, she has just one thought in her head—and that is how she's going to get herself a husband.

LUCILE. Oh, that's not true!

LEIGHTON (*serenely*). Whereas a married woman, with that important matter settled and out of the way, is free to act like a human being, and to interest herself in other things.

LUCILE. Do you think all the girls you meet want to marry you?

LEIGHTON. Oh, no. But I think they regard me merely as a possible—or an impossible husband. And I don't want them to regard me that way.

LUCILE. And how do you want them to regard you?

LEIGHTON. I'd much rather they didn't regard me at all.

LUCILE. Mr. Bangs, you need a lesson.

LEIGHTON. I'm always happy to learn.

LUCILE. I'll remember that.

(She rises and goes out through the hall and

then to the left. LEIGHTON rises as she goes out. He looks after her, shakes his head, shrugs his shoulders, then picks up the evening paper from the table and sits down and glances over it. TOM enters from left carrying a tray with cocktail glasses and shaker.)

TOM. Where's Lucile?

LEIGHTON. She went away—thank heaven. Look here, Tom, don't leave me alone with that girl again.

TOM. Why not?

LEIGHTON. Well, never mind, but don't. I wish Jane had told me she was going to be here.

TOM. I thought she did.

LEIGHTON. If she had, I shouldn't have come.

TOM. Why, Lucile's a corker. I don't see why you don't like her.

LEIGHTON. Who is this Mrs. Ellsworth Jane's having to-night?

TOM. Mrs. Ellsworth? Why, don't you know?

LEIGHTON. If I knew, I shouldn't be asking you.

TOM. Lucile is Mrs. Ellsworth.

LEIGHTON (excitedly). What! She's married?

TOM. Yes.

LEIGHTON. Oh, my God! (He staggers as if about to fall, clasps his hand to his heart, and collapses upon the couch.)

TOM (rushing to him in alarm). Leighton, old man, what's the matter? Are you faint? (LEIGHTON nods.) Here! (TOM seizes the cocktail shaker and places it to LEIGHTON's lips. LEIGHTON drinks deeply.) Do you feel better?

LEIGHTON. Not much.

TOM. I'd see a doctor if I were you, old chap. What do you suppose caused it?

LEIGHTON. You did.

TOM. I?

LEIGHTON. Yes. Didn't you say Lucile was married?

TOM. Of course she is.

LEIGHTON. I thought she was single. She was single last year.

TOM. Yes, but people aren't all as cold-blooded as you. They occasionally get married.

LEIGHTON. But I didn't think *she* would. Oh, what a fool I've been, what a blind fool!

TOM. I don't see why it should upset you if she *is* married.

LEIGHTON (*savagely*). Because I'm in love with her, you idiot. I've been in love with her ever since last year. And now I've lost her.

TOM. In love with Lucile?

LEIGHTON (*impatiently*). Yes—yes. How often must I tell you?

TOM. If you were in love with Lucile last year, why didn't you ask her to marry you?

LEIGHTON. I suppose I might as well tell you the truth about it.

TOM. I wish you would.

LEIGHTON. Well, Tom, I've definitely determined not to get married.

TOM. The more fool you.

LEIGHTON. Perhaps you're right. However, I've made up my mind to it. That's settled. (*He shakes his head sadly.*) But oh, Tom, I'm so susceptible.

TOM (*astonished*). Susceptible? *You*?

LEIGHTON. Frightfully.

TOM. Why, I thought you hated girls.

LEIGHTON (*sorrowfully*). I wish I did. But I don't. Anything but.

TOM. You always said you did.

LEIGHTON. That was my only salvation. I pretended to hate them. I was rude to them. I drove them away from me. For I knew that if I allowed myself to see much of them, I couldn't resist them. I would have fallen in love and proposed in spite of myself.

TOM. And that's the reason you've played around so much with all our wives instead of—

LEIGHTON. Exactly. I love feminine society, and my friends'

wives were safe. There could be no danger of my marrying *them*.

TOM (*laughing*). Well, Leighton, you're certainly a fox.

LEIGHTON. Oh, the scheme was perfect. And I thought I was safe. But you can't escape your destiny, and in spite of all my precautions, I fell in love. The minute Jane introduced me to Lucile last winter I knew I was gone. That's why I never dared let myself talk to her—why I made her think I hated her. Why, Tom, just before you came in, I practically insulted her! Think of it! Insulted that exquisite flower of womanhood—because I knew if I didn't, I would fall at her feet and tell her I adored her.

TOM. You've certainly got it bad.

LEIGHTON. Well, there's one comfort. At last I can throw off the mask of indifference and dislike. I can revel in the joy of her society—feast my eyes upon her loveliness. And all with impunity. As another's wife, she is forever beyond my reach.

TOM. Say, Leighton, why are you so set against getting married? You aren't going to become a monk or anything like that, are you?

LEIGHTON. Tom, can you keep a secret?

TOM. Sure thing.

LEIGHTON. From Jane?

TOM (*dubiously*). Well, I don't know. I could try.

LEIGHTON. No, you're not going to experiment with *my* secret. I wouldn't have Jane know it for the world.

TOM. Oh, come on, Leighton, tell me.

LEIGHTON. Not a chance. (*JANE enters left.*)

JANE. Hello, Leighton.

LEIGHTON. Hello, Jane.

JANE. Have you seen Lucile?

LEIGHTON. Yes, we had a very cosy little chat together. Why didn't you tell me she was married?

JANE. Why, I thought I did.

LEIGHTON. Well, you didn't. I should have liked to send her a wedding gift.

JANE. I thought you disliked her.

LEIGHTON. Disliked Lucile? What an absurd idea! I think she's one of the most charming women I've ever met.

JANE. Indeed? I seem to remember that you'd hardly speak to her when she was here last winter.

LEIGHTON. Oh, Jane, you must be mistaken.

TOM. No, Leighton, she's right. You weren't a bit nice to her. (*He begins to shake the cocktails.*)

LEIGHTON. Well, she's changed. I've always said married women were more attractive than—

JANE. She's just as attractive as she was last winter—no more and no less. I knew you'd like her if you got to know her.

LEIGHTON. Well, you were certainly right that time, Jane.

TOM. She always is. (*He begins to pour out the cocktails.*)

JANE. Listen to my lamb of a husband.

(*LUCILE enters from hall. She wears evening dress. TOM is just pouring out the cocktails as she enters.*)

LEIGHTON (*seizing a glass and rushing to her with it*). Here you are, Lucile. Here's your cocktail. (*LUCILE looks at him with astonishment.*)

LUCILE (*coldly*). Thank you so much, Mr. Bangs.

LEIGHTON (*raising his own glass*). Well, here's to Lucile! May she come early and stay late—if you know what I mean.

JANE. And here's luck, Lucile—if you know what I mean.

(*LUCILE laughs and chokes over her cocktail.*)

TOM (*solemnly*). Let her go! (*He drinks his cocktail.*)

LEIGHTON. We must have some parties while Lucile's here. (*He turns to her.*) How long are you going to stay?

LUCILE. I haven't decided yet. Not long.

JANE. Yes she is, too.

LEIGHTON. Well, how about to-morrow night?

TOM (*approaching with cocktail shaker*). Little dividend, Leight?

LEIGHTON. You bet your life. (*TOM fills LEIGHTON's glass.*) Suppose you all dine with me. Then we'll go to the the-

ater and dance a bit afterwards. (TOM refills his own glass.)

JANE. Leighton! That's awfully sweet of you.

LUCILE. No. I can't go to-morrow night.

JANE. Oh, honey, why not?

LUCILE. I've got to shop all day. I shall be too tired.

LEIGHTON (*eagerly*). You're going to be downtown to-morrow? Then lunch with me?

LUCILE. I never take luncheon, thank you. Just a glass of milk and a cracker.

LEIGHTON. Well, take a glass of milk and a cracker with me.

LUCILE. That would be absurd.

LEIGHTON. How about Wednesday night?

JANE. Is it all right for you, Tom?

TOM. Oh, sure.

JANE. Then that will be splendid.

LUCILE. But really, Jane—

JANE. You've made enough objections. Be still. (*Turning to LEIGHTON.*) I'll guarantee her appearance.

LEIGHTON. That's fine. Then next week there's the Subscription Dance. Of course you're going anyway, but if Lucile will let me take her, I should be delighted.

JANE. Come, Tom, we'll leave Lucile and Leighton to settle their dates. There is work for you, my friend, in the kitchen.

TOM (*rising*). No rest for the weary! What is it now?

JANE (*obviously inventing an excuse to take him away*). Why, the—the—it's the chafing dish. It's broken.

LUCILE (*eagerly*). Oh, let me fix it! I'm an excellent plumber. (*She starts for the door left after JANE.*)

TOM (*stepping before her and stopping her*). That may all be, my dear—but you're not a member of the local union. Consequently, you are not allowed to practise. (*He goes to door, then turns and holds up an admonitory finger.*) Children, be good! (*And he follows JANE off left. LUCILE sits down on the couch. Leighton comes over and sits beside her.*)

LEIGHTON. Lucile, will you go to the dance with me?

LUCILE. No.

LEIGHTON. Why not?

LUCILE. Because unmarried men bore me.

LEIGHTON. Oh, see here, Lucile—

LUCILE. When did we start calling each other by our first names—Mr. Bangs?

LEIGHTON. It seems to me that you used to call me "Leighton" when you were here last year.

LUCILE. Pardon me. I called you "Leighton" once—but only once. The promptness and emphasis with which you immediately afterwards addressed me as "Miss Morgan" cured me—Mr. Bangs. (*She rises and walks to the other side of the room. LEIGHTON follows her.*)

LEIGHTON. Lucile, I know I was rude and discourteous to you last winter. And I behaved abominably this evening when I first came in. But I apologize. (LUCILE does not answer. She does not appear to hear him. She is not even looking at him.) Won't you forgive me? (She pays no attention to him.) Are you going to answer me?

LUCILE (*finally looking round at him*). Must we converse?

LEIGHTON. I've already apologized. What more can I do?

LUCILE. You can let me alone.

LEIGHTON. Can't we be friends?

LUCILE. No, I despise you too much.

LEIGHTON. Because of my rudeness?

LUCILE. Because of your insincerity.

LEIGHTON. I'm not insincere! I honestly admire and like you. I want your friendship.

LUCILE. If that's true, you must have admired and liked me ten minutes ago. And yet you treated me like the dirt under your feet. Why? (LEIGHTON does not answer.) You see, you can't answer. But you don't have to—I know already. It's because you're so conceited you think every girl you meet is trying to marry you—and so weak you're afraid that, in spite of yourself, she'll succeed.

LEIGHTON (*protesting*). Oh, Lucile! Now, really—

LUCILE. *That's* why you treated me as you did. You thought I was setting my cap for you.

LEIGHTON. No, I didn't, Lucile.

LUCILE. You did! But you needn't have worried. No girl who had ever seen Ed Ellsworth would so much as consider you. (*After a pause.*) But, the very minute you hear that I'm married—that you're in no danger of losing your precious freedom—that it's perfectly safe—then you're eager enough to play about with me. (*After a pause.*) If there's anything I have a contempt for, it's the male coquette who dodges the responsibilities of marriage himself and flutters about after other men's wives.

LEIGHTON (*furiously angry*). I don't flutter about after them. I just sort of—well—enjoy their companionship.

LUCILE. Well, you needn't try to enjoy *my* companionship, because I won't have it.

LEIGHTON. If only you weren't married, I'd prove to you—

LUCILE. If I weren't married, the eligible Mr. Bangs would be standing at the other end of the room growling at me—and counting the minutes until Jane came back to save him from the designing young female.

LEIGHTON. Look here! I didn't intend to tell you this, for in spite of what you say, I've never made love to a married woman, *in my life*—

LUCILE (*wickedly*). Well, I'm sure you never risked making love to an *unmarried* one.

LEIGHTON. But the truth of the matter is, I've been in love with you ever since last winter.

LUCILE (*who doesn't believe a word of it*). Really?

LEIGHTON. Madly in love with you. I ought to have asked you to marry me then. But—there were reasons—

LUCILE. Yes, I have no doubt.

LEIGHTON. When Tom told me to-night you were married, it knocked the breath right out of me. I realized then that I'd lost you. And I've never been so unhappy in my whole life.

LUCILE (*encouragingly*). Go on. It entertains me immensely—and you're not running the slightest risk.

LEIGHTON (*in despair*). But it's true, I tell you! Won't you believe me? Of course I know I shouldn't be saying this to you, but I do so want you to understand. I'd give anything in the world if you weren't married.

LUCILE. Why?

LEIGHTON. So that I could ask you to marry me.

(LUCILE begins to laugh. She laughs on and on, growing almost hysterical. LEIGHTON stands looking at her sullenly. JANE and TOM enter from the left. TOM is smoking a cigarette.)

JANE. You two seem to be having a good time.

LEIGHTON. Great!

JANE. What on earth are you laughing at, Lucile?

(But LUCILE can only gurgle incoherently.)

TOM. Has Leighton been telling you some of his funny stories?

LUCILE (*regaining control of herself*). Yes—that was it.

TOM. He's got some corkers, hasn't he?

LUCILE. They're perfectly marvelous.

TOM. Say, Leighton, you didn't tell her that one about—

LEIGHTON. Of course I didn't, you big dumb-bell.

JANE. You'll have to forgive me for a late dinner, but there's a new maid. (Then noticing that LEIGHTON has taken out his cigarette-case.) Give me a cigarette, Leighton.

LEIGHTON (*passing her his case*). Certainly. (Passing it to LUCILE.) Mrs. Ellsworth?

LUCILE. No, thanks. (LEIGHTON lights JANE's cigarette and his own.)

JANE. Oh, Lucile doesn't smoke.

LUCILE (*to LEIGHTON*). I hate your kind. But I'll smoke one of Tom's.

TOM. Surest thing you know. (He offers LUCILE his case, and she takes one.)

JANE. Lucile! You don't mean to say you're smoking!

LUCILE (*calmly looking JANE straight in the eye*). I do. I always pay my bets.

JANE (*staring at LEIGHTON in amazement*). Well, for goodness' sakes! That certainly was quick work!

LEIGHTON (*coming down to LUCILE*). May I give you a light?

(*While the others are occupied down-stage, JANE takes the yellow envelope from her corsage, and unseen by them, slips it under the cocktail tray.*)

LUCILE. Oh, don't bother. (*She walks to the smoking-stand and lights her cigarette.*) I still retain the use of my limbs.

JANE. Tom, do take the cocktail things away.

TOM. Sure. I was leaving them there because there's one more dividend left.

JANE. Nobody wants it.

TOM. All right. (*He picks up the cocktail tray, but at once sets it down and picks up the yellow envelope.*) Say, there's a telegram here—for Lucile.

LUCILE (*anxiously*). For me? (*She comes over toward TOM.*)

TOM. Yes. Unopened. (*He takes it over toward LUCILE.*)

JANE. That idiot of a maid! She must have put it there and forgotten to tell me.

LUCILE (*taking it and tearing it open*). Excuse me.

(*She reads and then goes into violent hysterics. She is really laughing but that fact is not immediately apparent.*)

LEIGHTON (*rushing to her*). Lucile! What is it?

(*LUCILE collapses on the couch and buries her face in her hands. She drops the telegram on the floor, as she does so. TOM seizes the cocktail shaker and places it to LUCILE's lips. She drinks.*)

TOM. What's the matter, dear? (*But LUCILE does not answer. LEIGHTON picks up the telegram.*)

JANE. Read it, Leighton. We've got to know.

LEIGHTON (*reading*). "Mrs. Lucile Ellsworth, Care of —" (*He skips.*) "Your divorce from Edward Ellsworth was finally granted this afternoon. Signed, Snider, Bierce and

Pollock." My God! (*He begins to reread the telegram to himself.*)

JANE. Lucile! I'm so glad for you, dear.

TOM. You know, I thought she acted funny when I asked her about Ed. What was the trouble?

JANE. Desertion.

(LUCILE has never lifted her head from her hands, but her shoulders shake convulsively.)

LEIGHTON. Jane, do you and Tom mind if I speak to Lucile a moment alone? I've something rather important to tell her.

JANE. Of course not, Leighton. Come along, Tom.

(She takes his arm and draws him off toward left.)

TOM (in a whisper as he goes out). What do you suppose he wants to say to her?

JANE. I can't imagine. (They go out left. LEIGHTON stands looking at LUCILE a moment, the telegram in his hand.)

LEIGHTON. Lucile.

LUCILE (not looking up). Yes?

LEIGHTON. Look at me. (But she doesn't.) Oh, you needn't pretend to cry any more. I know you're laughing.

LUCILE (looking up hastily). What?

LEIGHTON. I didn't work in a telegraph office one summer for nothing. This thing is a fake. (He holds up the telegram. LUCILE again hides her face in her hands.) Have you ever been married at all? (LUCILE shakes her head without looking up.) Well, you fooled me, all right, if that's any satisfaction to you. I suppose you did it just to show what a four-flusher I was. (LUCILE does not answer.) Well, you missed out there. Because I'm not. I want to marry you worse than I ever did. (LUCILE looks up, but meeting his eye, hides her face again) But I can see you hate the sight of me. And I don't much blame you.

LUCILE (looking up). That isn't the reason—why I did it.

LEIGHTON. Then what is? (She does not answer.) Answer me!

LUCILE. I did it—because—I hoped you *weren't* a four-flusher.

LEIGHTON. Lucile, don't torment me! Do you mean that you care after all? That you want me?

LUCILE. Oh, Leighton, the very thing you've always been afraid of has happened—you've been trapped into a proposal by a designing woman—and what's worse, she's going to hold you to it.

LEIGHTON. Then you're going to marry me?

LUCILE. Well, what else do you suppose this has all been about?

LEIGHTON. Darling!

(*He kisses her. JANE and TOM enter left and observe them.*)

TOM. Oh. That was what we wanted to say to her.

LUCILE. I want you both to meet my second husband.

(*JANE goes over and kisses them both.*)

TOM. But Leighton, I thought you'd made up your mind not to marry?

LEIGHTON. I had. At least, not for a little more than a year. You see, there's a fortune of five hundred thousand dollars coming to me from my grandfather when I'm thirty, if I don't marry until then. The old gentleman didn't believe in early marriages. He married young himself and had bad luck.

LUCILE. And you're ready to give that all up for me?

LEIGHTON. You bet! I had a terrible scare, Lucile, when I thought I'd lost you. I'm not taking any more chances.

TOM. Well, Leighton, I wouldn't act too hastily, if I were you.

JANE. Be still, Tom. (*The dinner bell rings off left.*) Come on. Dinner's ready at last. (*She and TOM go in left.*)

LUCILE. Tom's right. We'll have a long engagement, Leighton.

LEIGHTON. We'll do nothing of the sort. I'd rather have you than the five hundred thousand.

LUCILLE. But silly, you can have us both, if we wait.

JANE (*off left*). The soup's getting cold.

LEIGHTON. I'm not going to wait that long.

LUCILE. Of course, my dear, the money means nothing to *me*,
but the time might come when *you* would regret it and—

LEIGHTON. But dearest, I never would! And don't you
see— (*The dinner bell rings off left.*)

LUCILE. I know, darling, but at the same time—

(*And as they argue with each other the dinner bell rings
on unheeded.*)

THE CURTAIN FALLS



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